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Williams, P.A.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

EMERSON'S IDEAS ON DEMOCRACY

by

Paul Albion Williams

(A.B., Brown University, 1926)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1938

THEORY OF THE

RELATIVE

THEORY

THEORY OF THE

BY

Paul Adrien

(L.A., Brown University, 1931)

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APPROVAL BY READERS

First Thomas R. Mather
Professor of English

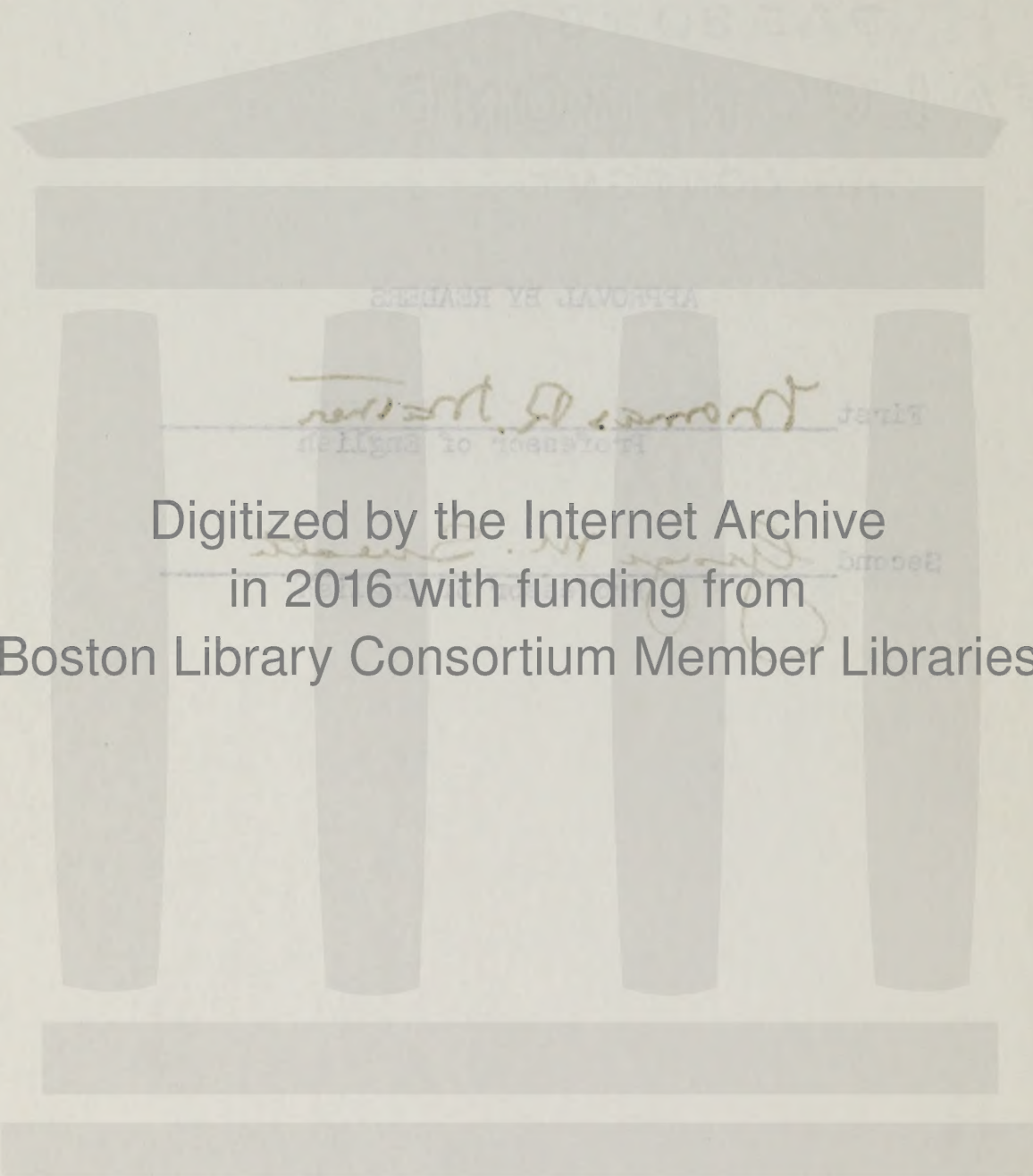
Second George M. Smeeth
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STATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis, Emerson's Ideas on Democracy, is to enlarge the scope of appreciation for Emerson. Long has his name as a philosopher been linked with an interpretation of nature, with a sort of didactic individualism, and with the combination of these two under the concept of Transcendentalism. But the average reader perhaps does not realize the extent and practicality of Emerson's philosophy as it applies to all phases of democracy. As is too often the case, he was the unheeded prophet of a more ideal American civilization; and the citizen who is vitally interested in preserving the ideals of democracy in the face of modern, post-war political travesties all over the world, will find in the pages of Emerson a re-emphasis of standards and the promulgation of theories that have become twentieth-century facts.

For substantiation of this thesis, material has been drawn only from the prose works of Emerson, excluding correspondence. Most of the material is presented in the form of direct quotations, although there have been a few free paraphrases of his paragraphs. With the presentation, there has been no attempt to discuss his conclusions in terms of events of succeeding decades. The application would be too obvious.

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EMERSON'S IDEAS ON DEMOCRACY

I. INTRODUCTION

The literate American knows the name of Emerson. A few can get a vague connotation of something spiritual when they hear of transcendentalism. Even the newspaper for the masses, no matter how provincial, will carry, on anniversary dates, anecdotes of Emerson's humanness or learning. He has, at least, become a name, a name in the history of American literature; but as a figure of any national significance, he will probably remain in the shadowy recesses of college halls. There, unquestionably, his casual readers will continue to view him as the mild, genial philosopher of Concord and environs. Even if he were looked upon as a potential mystic, few would grant him disciples for any political or economic dogma. The most realistic of readers would certainly never conceive of Emerson in the Cabinet as a Secretary of Labor, Commerce, or Agriculture. He was never the framer of a Reform Bill or of a Constitution, nor did he ever write a Tenure of Kings or a Wealth of Nations. But, on the other hand, never did he wander from the paths of wisdom to promulgate a Utopia or a Pantisocracy.

The very serenity of his existence in Concord and the extreme latitude of his philosophy combined to keep him from the feverish participation in public office, and to leave him free for wise consideration of the social, political, and

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The very serenity of his existence in Concord and the extreme latitude of his philosophy combined to keep him from the feverish participation in public office, and to leave him free for wise consideration of the social, political, and

religious forces of his country. Richard Garnett in his brief biography of Emerson summarizes: "Emerson could and did create a type of wisdom especially national, as characteristic of the West as Buddha's of the East."¹ Emerson's concept of the cultured mind might well apply to himself: "The trained human mind, metaphysically, is a citizen of the universe."² His knowledge of human nature, his experiences from travel, and his trust in universal laws produced an outlook on life in the United States that is amazingly accurate when superimposed upon the actual results of the last hundred years. But though Emerson's lectures, essays, and journals are richly padded with practical philosophy on every phase of democracy, yet never was he recognized for any definite thesis on political economy or sociology. As Prince Hal could observe even in the heat of youth: "Wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it." With his acquaintance with many of the political stalwarts of Massachusetts, Emerson might well have become a nineteenth-century "brain-truster." Perhaps his touch of transcendentalism, his attempt to interpret daily affairs in terms of divine reason and to see a relation with the eternal order of the world,³ caused hard-headed Yankees to shy. But so it is one of the great incompletenesses of democracy to be unable to judge where the best minds are.

We who read the modern poets can follow the influence

1 Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson

2 Progress of Culture

3 Poetry and Imagination

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of Emerson, or at least can realize that he was a forerunner, in this complete identity of the soul with human experiences and universal laws of nature. But who of us could possibly imagine that this same poetic philosopher who conceived of existence in terms of the Over-soul could comprehend life in a realistic and practical fashion? How amazing that he is not just the sort of man we should expect to be swayed by fiery reformers. Theoretical compacts like Brook Farm and Hopedale he treated with open suspicion. When he wrote post haste to two of Bronson Alcott's English converts on the Fruitlands project, he made very clear that Alcott might have had a few sound philosophical concepts, but that for the practical application thereof he could not be trusted. Passively, Emerson could be even more devastating to reformers who unwittingly approached him. His neighbor Mary Hosmer Brown quotes his reply to an Adventist who was predicting the world would end in a week. "Well," said Emerson, "I dare say we shall do very well without it."¹ On a larger scale he condemned them for their lack of intellectual or spiritual balance. "Although each prates of spirit, there is no spirit, but repetition, which is anti-spiritual."² "Reformers use outward and vulgar means. They do not rely on precisely that strength which wins me to their cause; not on love, not on a principle, but on men, on circumstances, on money, on party;

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2 Goethe; or, the Writer

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that is, on fear, on wrath, and pride."¹

So Emerson contemplated deeply and presented his conclusions wisely and without haste. In such a matter as national education, if his views could have been adopted and enforced one hundred years ago, untold energy would be saved today by state departments of education, by the National Education Association, and by the recent Federal projects. Just as explicitly did Emerson evaluate the position of the individual in a social, economic, and political state. He gave consideration to the functions of government. All in all, he estimated his American democracy as worthy of the faith of its founders and significant in terms of world civilization.

II. GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

Emerson's own personal faith in the republic came as the result of a natural heritage and training. His ancestors had been Colonial leaders and Revolutionary figures. Descending through a line of scholars and religious men, his temperament had produced the true philosophical bent. Concentrated study had taught him the lessons of history, and travel had helped prove them. His experiences produced threads with which it is possible, at least, to weave a pattern of democracy that should exist as long as man can be stirred by higher moral laws. This was the same feeling that Emerson

¹ Lecture on the Times at Masonic Temple, Boston

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A lecture on the Times at Masonic Temple, Boston

credited to our early settlers: "A deep religious sentiment¹ sanctified the thirst for liberty."

While still in extreme youth, Emerson looked upon America as synonymous with ideal democracy. With growing maturity, his views had to accept the alloy of more extensive observations. Yet never did he lose his optimism, nor had he any illusions about our civilization. Only over the transient and temporary misdeeds of his fellow men did he lose patience or indulge in the irony of: "I baptize thee in the name of the Governor, and of the Senate, and of the House of Representatives."² He believed too firmly in those natural laws which he expressed: "There is a tendency in things to right themselves, and the war or revolution or bankruptcy that shatters a rotten system, allows things to take a new and natural order."³ "The Times are the masquerade of the Eternities; trivial to the dull, tokens of noble and majestic agents to the wise."⁴ "No forms can have any dangerous importance whilst we are befriended by the laws of things."⁵ In a reference to history he continued: "Napoleon did all that in him lay to live and thrive without moral principle. It was the nature of things, the eternal law of man and of the world which balked and ruined him. Every experiment that has a sensual and selfish aim will fail."⁶ The same belief is

1 Historical Discourse at Concord - 1835

2 Journals

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translated from the Latin: "Things themselves refuse to be mismanaged."¹ He hoped that the very perfection of the solar system could be maintained in society so that affairs might progress without human, artificial restraints.²

The divine laws, which Emerson conceived of as relating the cosmic or natural laws to the affairs of mankind, helped explain the whole course of human history. The destiny of human life on this earth was the type of ideal democracy which Emerson envisioned. It would be a slow "grinding of the mills," for he knew that since "it takes millenniums to make a Bible,"³ it might take as long to perfect the adherents of such active charters as constitutions. In the case of the United States he admitted tremendous material advance, but added, "I will not say that American institutions have given a new enlargement to our idea of a finished man."⁴ But still through the pages of history he read that "the star of Empire rolls West."⁵ History showed: "Formerly, moral corruption struck the blow at Assyrian, Grecian, and Roman magnificence, and is at this day sapping the stability of European monarchies."⁶ The vein of a prophet was in those words. Emerson noted, furthermore, that "the oppressions of William the Norman, savage forest laws and crushing despotism made possible the

1 Wealth in Conduct of Life

2 Politics

3 Books

4 Progress of Culture - Phi Beta Kappa Address of 1867

5 The Superlative

6 The Present State of Ethical Philosophy

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 Rights, important a step as it was in 1689, Emerson conceived
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pay for the damage, and let us have done with it;" but
 spiritually could see that "the wars of history have served
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 thorn of dissent and innovation and heresy to prick the sides
 of conservatism."⁵

These were the rebellions that broke feudalism after
 it had grown "to be a bandit and brigand."⁶ "The culmination
 of these triumphs of humanity is the planting of America."⁷

- 1 Considerations by the Way
- 2 Result
- 3 The Fortune of the Republic
- 4 The Sovereignty of Ethics
- 5 Boston
- 6 The Young American
- 7 The Fortune of the Republic

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"The establishing of the American government --- was formed in the very spirit of enlarged knowledge and liberal notions."¹
 This was the foundation of a country that seemed to widen man's horizon and enhance his natural rights. Its liberty "was to be built on Religion, the Emancipator; Religion which teaches equality of all men in view of the spirit which created man."²
 The liberty which emanated from a sturdy faith in the Divinity was to Emerson "an accurate index of general progress,"³ a progress from the period of kingly concessions to one of the spiritual equations of freedom and equality. "The civil history of men might be traced by the successive meliorations as marked in higher moral generalizations."⁴

Whether this establishment of the American democracy was the actual destiny of race or nations, or was the natural outcome of growing intelligence on the part of the masses, at least to be successful it had to be bound by certain moral attitudes and to be guided by clear-cut purposes. In regard to these ideas Emerson was as specific as his assurance over the part played by natural laws and by the tide of history. From his own stature of soul, he sought ultimately the ennoblement of man and society. He knew it could come through a stern life and an active life. He could sense a philosophy of existence for man. Henry Thoreau's remark was worth copying into his Journals: "As long as a man stands in his own

1 The Present State of Ethical Philosophy

2 Boston

3 The Fugitive Slave Law

4 The Sovereignty of Ethics

"The establishment of the American government -- was based on
the very spirit of enlarged knowledge and liberal notions."
This was the foundation of a country that seemed to widen and
expand and advance its natural rights. The liberty was to
be built on religion, the moralist; religion which teaches
equality of all men in view of the spirit which created man."
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From his own sphere of work, he sought distinctly the en-
noblement of man and society. He knew it could come through
a stern life and an active faith. He could sense a philosophy
of existence for all. Every individual's work was part of
the race and journey: "We live as a man lives in his own

1 The Progress of the American Philosophy

2 Emerson

3 The Active Principle

4 The Government of the People

way, everything seems to be in his way, governments, society, etc." Agreement with this impelled him to exhort: "Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better."¹ And again: "A man contains all that is needful to his government within himself. He is made a law unto himself. All real good or evil that can befall him must be from himself."² "The world exists for the education of each man."³ Society might be "built of harsh Necessity";⁴ yet Emerson wished every man to justify his existence and fortify his intelligence by realizing that "all forms of institutions are merely pictures or allegories of the laws of the mind."⁵ He liked the kind of rugged atmosphere that engendered great men, for they "serve us as insurrections do in bad governments."⁶ "We must have kings, and we must have nobles. Nature provides such in every society, - only let us have the real instead of the titular."⁷ "There is no prosperity, trade, art, city, or great material wealth of any kind, but if you trace it home you will find it rooted in a thought of some individual man."⁸ "Open the doors of opportunity to talent and virtue. In a free and just commonwealth, property rushes from the idle and imbecile to

1 Journals

2 Ibid.

3 History

4 The Sovereignty of Ethics

5 Ibid.

6 Character

7 The Young American

8 Success

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- 1 Journals
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 History
- 4 The Sovereignty of Ethics
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- 6 Character
- 7 The Young American
- 8 Success

the industrious, brave and persevering."¹ "The roisterous, energetic type must have some vent for their explosive complexion. These are the originators and executors. ----The excess of virility has the same importance in general history as in private and industrial life."²

This was the type of mind and energy that Emerson saw everywhere. He was glad of a country the genius of which was opportunity, "the opportunity of civil rights, of education, of personal power."³ He was more glad, however, when all these desirable "men of original perception and original action"⁴ were strengthened by an intellect that "annuls Fate."⁵ So far as a man thinks, he is free." He wanted these same men motivated by an integrity that would make them "faithful obeyers of duty, filled with the purpose of carrying out the desire and need of mankind."⁶ "Action is legitimate and good; forever be it honored! right, original, private, necessary action, proceeding new from the heart of man, and going forth to beneficent ends."⁷ By such native capability and worthy motives they would represent the "real aristocracy."⁸ "Natural laws will take care of such evaluation."⁹ These are the men

1 Wealth in Conduct of Life

2 Power

3 The Fortune of the Republic

4 Ibid.

5 Fate

6 The Fortune of the Republic

7 The Scholar

8 Aristocracy

9 Ibid.

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- 1 Wealth in Contact of Life
- 2 Power
- 3 The Fortune of the Republic
- 4 Fate
- 5 Fate
- 6 The Fortune of the Republic
- 7 The Scholar
- 8 Aristocracy
- 9 Fate

who would have "the right to command" once they have learned¹ the law of obedience.

In his ideal democracy Emerson would put only this type of man as leader in the government, for his would be a government not of politicians and politics. "Politics is a deleterious profession, like some poisonous handicrafts."² "Politics is an after-work, a poor patching. We shall one day learn to supersede politics by education."³ But before the multitude shall have matured to that Utopian state of intelligence and reasonableness when politicians can no longer function, the State exists "to educate the wise man."⁴ "Constitutions nor laws are of any use in themselves. The help is in the head and heart of a man."⁵ And when the wise man as overseer with his "keys of Nature and history,"⁶ can unlock the resources of his State, then would sooner be put into practice the larger object of the State, - "the greatest good of the greatest number."⁷ "Man's reason for existence is I serve."⁸ Through his service, furthermore, "the nation must be governed by common sense and the law of morals. Morality is the object of government,"⁹ a type of moral responsibility

1 Perpetual Forces

2 Power

3 Culture

4 Politics

5 The Fugitive Slave Law

6 The Scholar

7 Character

8 The Fortune of the Republic

9 Ibid.

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- 1 Perpetual Forces
- 2 Power
- 3 Culture
- 4 Politics
- 5 The Primitive Slave Law
- 6 The Scholar
- 7 Character
- 8 The Fortune of the Republic
- 9 Iola.

that has seen the interest of history become centered in the fortunes of the poor,¹ and that has given recognition to the abilities and interests of women, - "women, who always carry the conscience of a people."² "Certainly all my points would be sooner carried in the state if women voted."³

There had always been discrimination against and injustice toward the poor and the weak, and for them Emerson felt that "humanity suggests a tender and paternal government."⁴ To see and acknowledge the truth "is the summit of being; justice is the application of it to affairs."⁵ But what was more vital to Emerson than all the cases of economic misfortune, was the lack of virtue in people's inability to "learn the lesson of self-help. Society is full of infirm people, who incessantly summon others to serve them."⁶ "A state of war or anarchy, in which law has little force, is so far valuable that it puts every man on trial. But in peace and a commercial state we depend, not as we ought, on our knowledge that we are honest men, but we cowardly lean on the virtue of others. It is their virtue which keeps the law in any reverence and power."⁷ The antidotes, Emerson felt, for such moral laxity could come, not through law enforcement, but through a dependence on one's own honor and labor and through

1 Man the Reformer

2 Speech on Affairs in Kansas; also, Manners

3 Journals

4 The Fortune of the Republic

5 Character in The Times, 1841

6 Man the Reformer

7 The Conservative

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- 1 Man the Reformer
- 2 Speech on Affairs in Kansas; also, Wentworth
- 3 Journal
- 4 The Fortune of the Republic
- 5 Character in the Times, 1841
- 6 Man the Reformer
- 7 The Conservative

a desire for the affections of mankind.¹ "To make good the cause of Freedom, you must draw off from all foolish trust in others. Each must be a Declaration of Independence or a charter in himself. He only who is able to stand alone is qualified for society. In that way he protects the state. ---- There is no Constitution but one's dealing well and justly with his neighbor; no liberty but his invincible will to do right."² This was the rugged individualism, rightly considered, of our forefathers, the early founders who "accepted the divine ordination that man is for use; and that his ruin is to live for pleasure and for show."³

Such men, who by nature or inheritance knew how to rule themselves, would found a government, for they would be aware that "order is heaven's first law";⁴ but being refined in themselves, they would not need such a formal or complex state.⁵ It would be functional merely for their needs or conveniences, since ideally "the state must follow and not lead the character and progress of the citizen."⁶

"When the Church is social worth,
When the state-house is the hearth,
Then the perfect State is come,
The republican at home."⁷

"Power in the people, as in republican forms, has the effect

1 The Conservative

2 The Fugitive Slave Law; also Heroism

3 Boston

4 The Scholar

5 Worship

6 Politics

7 The poem Politics

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- 1 The Conservative
- 2 The Primitive Slave Law; also Herodas
- 3 Boston
- 4 The Scholar
- 5 Warship
- 6 Politics
- 7 The poem Politics

of holding things closer to common sense. A republic has too many observers to allow its head to be turned by any kind of nonsense."¹ If democracy depended upon active and thoughtful participation in the government, then Emerson readily sensed that the public assembly was more nearly honest in getting at the people's needs. "I like the primary assembly. I have little esteem for governments. I set the private man first. The assembly is to watch the government. Man must be able to stand alone."² "Our public assemblies are pretty good tests of manly force."³ With a rightful sense of pride that bordered on John Hancock's defiance when he wrote his signature for the weak eyes of George III, Emerson uttered in 1835: "The town-meeting method should be copied and sent to the English Government as a certificate of progress of the Saxon race; to continental nations as a lesson of humanity and love."⁴

Provided man remained firm in his principles, constantly "inspired by the Divine Soul,"⁵ then would develop a breadth of civilization in which statute law would express and not impede the mind of mankind;⁶ in which the dollar would be "not value, but representative of value, and, at last, of moral values";⁷ and in which "governments stand by man's

1 The Fortune of the Republic

2 Speech on Affairs in Kansas

3 Character in The Times - 1841

4 Historical Discourse at Concord

5 The American Scholar - Phi Beta Kappa Address of 1837

6 The Young American

7 Wealth in Conduct of Life

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- 1 The Fortune of the Republic
- 2 Speech on Affairs in Kansas
- 3 Character in the Times - 1841
- 4 Historical Discourse at Concord
- 5 The American Scholar - Phi Beta Kappa Address of 1837
- 6 The Young American
- 7 Wealth in Conduct of Life

credence"¹ and by "the one eternal policy of moral rectitude."² What Emerson predicted of Boston would then be true of the whole democracy: "As long as she cleaves to her liberty, her education, and to her spiritual faith as the foundation of these, she will teach the teachers and rule the rulers."³

Progress toward this goal would necessarily be fraught with dangers. Emerson wanted to reach this goal, and he did not hesitate to point out obstacles and to warn people of engulfing morasses. "The multitude have no habit of self-reliance or original action";⁴ they "are tainted with this insanity (of success), as our bankruptcies and our reckless politics may show."⁵ "Excellence is lost sight of in the hunger for sudden performance and praise."⁶ As a result, only too often do "the populace drag down the gods to their own level."⁷ Emerson hated not only "this shallow Americanism which hopes to get rich by credit,"⁸ but also any form of "coward compromise, the seed of vice,"⁹ which pertained to private or public life. He was forced to conclude that "they have a long education to undergo to reach simplicity and plain-dealing."¹⁰ "Union is a delectable thing, and so is

- 1 The Sovereignty of Ethics
- 2 The Present State of Ethical Philosophy
- 3 Boston
- 4 Power
- 5 Success
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Character in North American Review
- 8 Success
- 9 The Fortune of the Republic
- 10 Success

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wealth, and so is life, but they may all cost too much, if¹ they cost honour."

Emerson countered these admissions with the inspirational cry of a patriarch: "I wish to see America a benefactor such as no country ever was, hospitable to all nations, legislating for all nationalities."² He had only to listen to the truths of his own unshackled spirit and ever to turn to his volumes of history in order to rearouse that abiding optimism in a young democracy and in, if not the complete perfectability, at least the development of individuals. Patriots and pioneers had taught him that "selfish luxury is a spirit that is not American."³ It had long been the nature of civilized people to plan for the future. "It is easy to see that the existing generation are conspiring with a beneficence which, in its working for coming generations, sacrifices the passing one. The history of commerce is the record of this beneficent tendency.

'Man's heart the Almighty to the Future set
By secret and inviolable springs.'"⁴

"The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture."⁵ To this last quality Emerson gave the

1 Journals

2 The Fortune of the Republic

3 Ibid.

4 The Young American

5 The Transcendentalist

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Emerson countered these admissions with the inspiring rational cry of a patriot: "I wish to see America a benefactor such as no country ever was, hospitable to all nations, listening for all nationalities."² He had only to listen to the truths of his own unshackled spirit and ever to turn to his volumes of history in order to resource that abiding optimism in a young democracy and in, if not the complete perfectibility, at least the development of individuals. Patriots and pioneers had taught him that "selfish luxury is a spirit that is not American."³ It had long been the nature of civilized people to plan for the future. "It is easy to see that the existing generation are conspiring with a benevolence which, in its working for coming generations, sacrifices the passing one. The history of commerce is the record of the beneficent tendency."

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- 1 Journals
- 2 The Fortune of the Republic
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The Young American
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greatest importance when he wrote: "The highest end of govern-
 ment is the culture of men."¹ It should be noted that when
 Emerson used the term highest end, he did not want it confused
 with the phrase chief aim of government. To him highest con-
 noted that tone of intelligence and spirituality which may
 surmount but must accompany the socialized program of the state.
 He confessed its higher idealism when he recorded: "Certainly
 I go for culture, and not for multitudes."² This culture,
 "which implies the mind in possession of its own powers, can
 raise one politically. It's a rival to monarchy."³ Republican
 and radical as he was, Emerson responded whole-heartedly to
 any force that was opposed to monarchy in its usual significance.
 "On general grounds, whatever tends to form manners or to
 finish men, has a great value."⁴ "That country is the fairest
 which is inhabited by the noblest minds."⁵

Thus Emerson, that philosopher in whose essays the
 casual reader most often finds only the didactic note, has
 shown himself to be practical and realistic. He has been
 moral - yes, moral - but a morality infused with a clear wis-
 dom which finds applicability to the well-being of mankind.
 His practicality has directed the rays of history onto the
 growth of democracy, in which the establishment of government
 must depend upon certain well-defined impulses and goals.

1 Politics

2 Journals

3 Progress of Culture

4 Aristocracy

5 Heroism

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- 1 Politics
- 2 Journals
- 3 Treatise of Culture
- 4 Autobiography
- 5 Herosim

And finally, by the analysis of several natural laws as they apply to society, institutions, and the individual, Emerson has given a partial answer to the perplexing question of the ages, "Whither mankind?"

Let us summarize Emerson's general philosophy about the meaning of democracy by two quotations that suggest benefits that would accrue to man and society, were democracy as perfect as Emerson envisioned. "Now can your children be educated, your labor turned to their advantage, and its fruits secured to them after your death. As soon as you put your gifts to use, you shall have according to your exhibition of desert."¹ "We have come to feel 'by ourselves our safety must be bought'; to know the resources, good-will, the conviction of the moral advantages of freedom, social equality, education, and religious culture; and determine to hold fast to this American civilization."²

III. POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

To read Emerson as he expresses himself in philosophical concepts about democratic tendencies and the causes thereof does not give an unexpected result, and Richard Garnett's estimate of his political worth might not be too revealing: "Happy would it be for the United States if Emerson's essay on Compensation in particular could be impressed upon

1 The Conservative

2 Social Aims

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the conscience, where there is any, of every political leader; and interwoven with the very texture of the mind of every one who has a vote to cast."¹ But if one had the temerity to suggest that from Emerson's writing a practical textbook, or at least a handbook, on politics and government could be culled, doubt might be raised.

So it is, however. Emerson was very specific in his attacks upon politics, because once seeing a danger, he never withheld his hand. He was honest enough to justify the existence of politics: "All classes and interests must have their spokesmen. A political class must be built up."² But he could not dam the power once it had gathered itself. "The Fultons and Watts of politics, believing in unity, saw that it was a power, and by satisfying society with justice, they have contrived to make of this terror the most harmless and energetic form of a State."³ The politicians, furthermore, considering "persons and property as the two objects for whose protection government exists,"⁴ immediately built up the state with that goal in view. They gained ascendancy because "economical power touches the masses through the political lords."⁵ They built their superstructure and enhanced their position in the eyes of their constituents.

1 Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson

2 Eloquence

3 Fate

4 Politics

5 Wealth in Conduct of Life

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- 1 Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson
- 2 Speeches
- 3 Ways
- 4 Politics
- 5 Wanted in Conduct of Life

But on that score Emerson was merciless. After visits to Washington his remarks were philippic: "In Washington the air was electric and violent. Yet one feels how little, more than how much, Man is represented there."¹ To him Congress showed the lack of "the light incarnated, reason and virtue clothed in flesh."² The result was: "The voice of the intelligent and the honest, of the unconnected and independent, the voice of truth and equity, is suppressed."³ "Senators and presidents have climbed so high as an apology for real worth."⁴

On the other side of the picture Emerson was aware that many of the people "know that they need in their representative much more than talent, namely the power to make his talent trusted."⁵ In this case Emerson put the blame upon the people: "America - it is a village littleness; - village squabble and rapacity characterize its policy. It is a great strength on a basis of weakness."⁶ "The Americans are free-willers, fussy, self-asserting, buzzing all round creation.---- America is formless, has no terrible and no beautiful condensation."⁷ The most pointed criticism was against the lassitude of the American voter, who was interested chiefly in getting money.⁸ As Emerson pointed out, because the power of money

1 Journals

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Politics

5 Character in The Times

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- 1 Journals
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Politics
- 5 Character in The Times
- 6 Journals
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 The Fortune of the Republic

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Again Emerson flayed the public for its credulity. "A sect or party is an elegant incognito devised to save a man from the vexation of thinking."⁶ "The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul."⁷ The chief disgrace of the world is for the individual "not to be a unit by himself."⁸ No one should be reckoned of a party or have his "opinion predicted geographically."⁹ Unless people could learn "the wisdom of sending character instead of talent to Congress,"¹⁰ Emerson foresaw the permanent arresting of democratic progress: "I grieve to see the Government is

1 Politics

2 Ibid.

3 The Fortune of the Republic

4 Speech on Affairs in Kansas

5 Ibid.

6 Journals

7 The American Scholar

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Journals

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- 2 Ibid.
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- 7 The American Scholar
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- 10 Journals

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In summary, Emerson deprecated the fact that man made
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 This would explain Emerson's own non-participation. It was
 not that he was averse to great activity, even on the part of
 politicians. "The project of innovation is the best possible
 state of things."⁴ Too often, however, disasters resulted
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 spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless.
 From neither party has the world any benefit commensurate with
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 Instead, "emphasis on virtue - by which the moral controls the
 will - will do away with loose politics and make the land free

1 Journals

2 Ibid.

3 Montaigne

4 The Conservative

5 Perpetual Forces

6 Politics

7 The Conservative

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- 1 Journals
- 2 1840
- 3 1841
- 4 The Conservative
- 5 The Conservative
- 6 Politics
- 7 The Conservative

for individual development in humanity."¹ "There will dawn ere long on our politics, on our mode of living, a nobler morning in the sentiment of love."²

Before the Utopia could arrive, Emerson recognized the vastness of the problems, the complexity arising from the largeness of the United States with its many interests,³ as well as the growing population, - although around 1860 there were only about thirty millions of inhabitants. He was glad to see the arrival of aliens;⁴ he knew the value of having "in our republican doctrine -- a variety of opinions";⁵ but before they had absorbed the wisdom of living by a new freedom, they presented problems. In extreme moments Emerson wrote: "Leave this hypocritical prating about the masses. Masses are rude, lame, unmade, pernicious in their demands and influence, and need not to be flattered but to be schooled."⁶ Oftentimes they were as a mob, "a society of bodies voluntarily bereaving themselves of reason and traversing its work."⁷ "The new race is stiff, heady and rebellious; they are fanatics in freedom; they hate tolls, taxes, yea, almost laws."⁸ With some sense of despair Emerson added: "If government knew how,

1 Progress of Culture

2 Man the Reformer

3 Eloquence

4 Journals

5 Address to Kossuth - 1852

6 Considerations by the Way

7 Compensation

8 Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England

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- 1 Progress of Culture
- 2 The New Religion
- 3 Emerson
- 4 America
- 5 Address to Massachusetts - 1832
- 6 Considerations by the Way
- 7 Conclusion
- 8 Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England

I should like to see it check, not multiply the population."¹

Even among the more intelligent, the so-called respectable, was found a dangerous apathy: "In this country, the emphasis of conversation and of public opinion commends the practical man; and the solid portion of the community is named with significant respect. Ideas are subversive of social order and comfort, and at last make a fool of the possessor."²

Emerson saw some light as a possible solution from his intimate acquaintance with the English. Although both their democracy and monarchy were incomplete because of irreconcilable attitudes, yet he could write: "I leave England with an increased respect for the Englishman. His stuff or substance seems to be the best of the world."³ "The American system is more democratic, more humane, yet does not yield better men. Congress is not wiser than Parliament. The power of performance has not been exceeded, - the creation of value. The English have given importance to individuals, a principal end and fruit of every society. --- By this general activity and by this sacredness of individuals, they have evolved the principles of freedom. It will be remembered as an island famous for immortal laws."⁴ If government through its laws cannot heed this high destiny for individuals, then it is corrupt,

¹ Considerations by the Way

² Goethe; or, the Writer

³ Letter to Margaret Fuller Ossoli

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- 1 Considerations by the Way
- 2 Quoted by the writer
- 3 Letter to Margaret Fuller, Oct. 1841
- 4 Result

and "good men must not obey the laws too well."¹ Emerson loved the history of his own state when, as a colony, it rebelled. "When Massachusetts had its heroic day, it had no government - it was an anarchy."² Emerson was convinced of the need of government, but this applause hinted at certain limits to which courage would march when justice was at stake. And since "a party is perpetually corrupted by personality,"³ "there will always be a government --- where men are selfish."⁴

If, then, weaknesses were to be eradicated and the real spirit of democracy to be used advantageously, liberality had to be the keynote of state, and the form of government had to be so planned that there could be "reconciliation between the theory and practice of life,"⁵ thus "securing the greatest good of the greatest number."⁶ "Conservatism stands on circumstance, liberalism on power,"⁷ and the sum of power is the applicability of natural forces in the hands of thinking men.⁸ Government and individuals had to go hand in hand. "The man must bend to the law, never the law to him."⁹ "Every law and usage was a man's expedient to meet a particular case; they are all alterable."¹⁰ Emerson believed with Napoleon:

- 1 Politics
- 2 Speech on Affairs in Kansas
- 3 Politics
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Montaigne
- 6 Civilization (Cf. Character in No. Amer. Rev.)
- 7 The Conservative
- 8 The Fortune of the Republic
- 9 Perpetual Forces
- 10 Politics

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"Incidents ought not to govern policy, but policy, incidents.---
To be hurried away by events is to have no political system at
all."¹ Because "society is a wave"² in its multitude of
interests and in its fluidity of activities, Emerson's total
demand of government was foresight, equity of opportunity, and
justice in social legislation and international relationships.

Emerson evidently enjoyed the story about politics in
Sicily which he heard from Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the
occasion of his visit in 1832, but rarely was he so pessimistic
about the general state of American politics that he thought it
parallel. It was: "Sicily was an excellent school of politi-
cal economy; for, in any town there, it only needed to ask what
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be done."³ Neither could he for one minute agree with Bret
Harte, who claimed that gamblers and prostitutes had brought
music, styles, and general culture to California; he was
assured that religion effected most culture in any society.⁴
Yet, ironically, in the fostering of this same culture, he
observed: "'Tis curious that Christianity, which is idealism,
is sturdily defended by the brokers, and steadily attacked by
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The best manner of building up an intelligent vote,
of dispelling social superstitions, or of offsetting political

1 Napoleon; Man of the World

2 Self-reliance

3 First Visit to England

4 The Sovereignty of Ethics

5 Journals

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- 1 Napoleon: Man of the World
- 2 Self-Reliance
- 3 Great Visit to England
- 4 The Government of Athens
- 5 Journals

vices was through progressive legislation. This would likewise correct cases of inequity whenever or wherever they might appear. Even though the illustrations which Emerson used may not be pertinent in the same way today, yet for the principle involved they must be presented. He was strongly against slavery.¹ In 1846 he urged that negroes be released from taxes seeing that they had no passport rights.² "Who makes and keeps the Jew or the Negro base, who but you, who exclude them from the rights which others enjoy?"³ And in regard to child labor, debtor's prison, and city slum conditions, he gave what little credit was then due: "The next generation will thank Dickens for showing so many mischiefs which parliaments and Christianities had not been strong enough to remove."⁴ "The State is our neighbors; our neighbors are the State. It is folly to treat the State as if it were some individual, arbitrarily willing thus and so."⁵ Faith in an honest government could produce those miracles, and taxes, as an expression of that faith, was, in Emerson's mind, necessary for the order of things. He had no respect for denouncers.⁶

This same principle of justice in social reform was applied by Emerson when he conceived of legislation on a

1 Address on the (tenth) Anniversary of the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies, August 1, 1844

2 Journals

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

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All these financial burdens of the state could more readily be carried provided Emerson's ideas on three separate points became a part of statute law or were inculcated in the

- 1 Woman
- 2 Progress of Culture
- 3 The Fortune of the Republic
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minds of the taxpayers. First, if the nature of people¹ became "more refined, the government would be less formal," thus cutting down the tremendous overhead that today makes up the Federal and state governments. Second, "we want a state of things in which crime will not pay."² Much of this could be eliminated by less selfishness. Our distrust of the integrity and purposes of the state leads logically to crime and its consequent support of prisons and courts.³ Third, Emerson estimated the heavy cost of war or even the upkeep of national defense. "War, as any society or institution, is merely a thought of some men --- In a cruder society necessities of the strong are satisfied at the cost of the weak."⁴ Emerson lived through the Civil War; and though he was no pacifist, he could well distinguish between justice and greed.

Further obvious functions of society that redounded to the increased freedom and understanding of the individual,⁵ were freedom of the press,⁶ free trade,⁶ and civic protection.⁷ These were ideas which, Emerson always contended, any sincere, intelligent person could uphold. To meet any and all demands,⁸ a government "should be a plant; it cannot be a fossil."

1 Worship

2 The Fortune of the Republic

3 Man the Reformer

4 War

5 Progress of Culture

6 Ibid.

7 The Sovereignty of Ethics

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1	Worship
2	The Fortune of the Republic
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4	War
5	Progress of Culture
6	Idol
7	The Sovereignty of Ethics
8	The Young American

In paying honor to the illustrious Hungarian patriot, Kossuth, at Concord, Emerson said: "One day the politics of Europe and America will mingle, just as their shores are getting closer and closer."¹ Just because by this prediction he widened the scope of government, Emerson did not, however, go astray from any of his principles. He knew that eventually all nations, even those which were not at the time democracies, would be obliged to give their attention to the growing destiny of man as a rightful being. "'Tis pedantry to estimate nations by the census, or by the square miles of land, or other than by their importance to the mind of the time."² "Mediation and international arbitration are projects the bare starting of which proves civilization and Christianity."³ The same honesty of intent appeared in the two exhortations: "The faith of treaties must be kept inviolate."⁴ "America should affirm that in no instance shall the guns go in advance of the present right. We must treat all on principles of honest trade and mutual advantage."⁵ Emerson admitted that England's colonial policy had become liberal, and that in their conquest of the globe the traders had carried with them the heritage of Saxon liberty.⁶ This liberality and freedom were all right, but the conquest of another people was contrary to the

1 Address to Kossuth

2 Considerations by the Way

3 Politics

4 The Present State of Ethical Philosophy

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fundamentals of the individual right of self-destiny. "This undertaking for another is the blunder which stands in colossal ugliness in the governments of the world."¹

As might be expected, Emerson had a few ideas more advanced than his times, the soundness of which, however, has been proved many times since their promulgation. "Government would be but an easy extension of our commercial system."²

The policy would be to appoint as governors those who had a genius for the disposition of affairs, and to pay only those fit to govern. "Could any means be contrived to appoint only those!"³ A second proposition was a form of socialized

activity. "Fourier, the Brook Farm, etc. were unconscious prophets of a true state of society."⁴

"All this beneficent socialism is a friendly omen. Witness Communism, Trades' Union, the Communities of Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Hopedale."⁵

By no means did Emerson accept all their philosophies, but by making compulsory use of the capabilities of every man, these cooperatives would unquestionably bring economic success.

From the experience of the colleagues of Brook Farm, who had no thoughts because there was too much labor, Emerson added a concession that perhaps literary men and artists "ought to be released from every species of public or private respon-

¹ Politics

² The Young American

³ Ibid.

⁴ Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England

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IV. ECONOMICS

By far the most anthropocentric views of Emerson were in the field of economics. As a Calvinist hated the devil, so Emerson hated a "dollar" civilization; but he did not renounce the material personality of man's activities, for as he looked about, he observed many existing facts that justified his faith in an ultimate goal for democracy. "But the proudest result of this creation (of a democratic independence) has been the great and refined forces it has put at the disposal of the private citizen."⁴ As ever, however, Emerson put the responsibility for real value and success directly upon the worth of the individual. On the one side were his spiritual warnings: "As long as our civilization is essentially one of

1 Journals

2 The Young American

3 Social Aims

4 Wealth in English Traits

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property, of fences, of exclusiveness, it will be mocked by¹ delusions." "A people satisfied with cheap performance will not easily arrive at better."² When such conditions existed, Emerson could write: "The lesson of these days is the vulgarity of wealth."³ But as a solution he could add that genius⁴ was the remedy for a money-spirit and respectability. "Power obeys reality and not appearance; according to quality and not quantity."⁵ "Prosperity of this country has been merely the obedience of man to the guiding of nature."⁶ "The resources of America and its future will be immense only to wise and virtuous men."⁷ "If a man knows the laws of nature, his country cannot spare him."⁸

On April 14, 1938, President Roosevelt announced to the people of the American democracy: "I conceive the first duty of government is to protect the economic welfare of all the people in all sections and in all groups." By coincidence, in Washington, D. C., too, Emerson announced to his audience in January, 1862: "There is no interest in any country so imperative as that of labor. Governments and constitutions exist for it."⁹ In this theory of political economy Emerson,

- 1 Napoleon; Man of the World
- 2 Progress of Culture
- 3 Journals
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Progress of Culture
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as usual, emphasized labor, which was from man's point of view, although he made no distinction between agriculture, day labor, industrial machine work, or commercial activity. In all these endeavors there must be a creative economy, which "is the fuel of magnificence."¹

For every phase, also, Emerson was fully aware of natural principles of economy: "Free Trade is fit for one nation only on condition that all adopt it."² "The basis of political economy is non-interference. Do not legislate. Meddle, and you snap the sinews with your sumptuary laws."³ "The harvest will be better preserved and go farther laid up in private bins, in each farmer's corn-barn, than if it were kept in national granaries."⁴ "Wealth has its source in applications of the mind to nature, - in bringing things from where they abound to where they are wanted."⁵ "It is each man's interest that there be wealth or surplus somewhere."⁶ "Health of man is an equality of inlet and outlet. Any hoarding is tumor and disease."⁷ "The power of England goes to show that domesticity is the tap-root which enables a nation to branch wide and high."⁸

Then as to the activity of employer or employee, Emerson added other principles: "The one prudence in life is concen-

1 Aristocracy

2 Journals

3 Wealth in Conduct of Life

4 Journals

5 Wealth

6 Ibid.

7 Perpetual Forces

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2 Journals
3 Wealth in Conduct of Life
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7 Perpetual Forces
8 Journals

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Emerson took cognizance also of man's activities on a smaller scale: "Let him see that as much wisdom may be expended on a private economy as on an empire."⁷ "A man may have that allowance he takes."⁸ "What belongs to the individual will come to him; what does not cannot be given."⁹

These natural laws and principles were constant factors, no matter what the situation, and Emerson had corresponding faith because they were so. In the matter of certain statute laws, however, he noted danger. "The last ages have been characterized by the immense creation of property."¹⁰ In turn,

1 Power

2 Perpetual Forces

3 Wealth in Conduct of Life

4 Ibid.

5 Politics

6 Compensation

7 Prudence

8 Spiritual Laws

9 Footnote by Edward Waldo Emerson to Gifts in The Dial

10 Politics

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- 10 Politics
- 9 Footnote by Edward Waldo Emerson to Gifts in The Dial
- 8 Spiritual Laws
- 7 Prudence
- 6 Commensuration
- 5 Politics
- 4 Ibid.
- 3 Wishes in Conduct of Life
- 2 Perpetual Forces
- 1 Power

"all property must and will pay its tax"¹ to maintain the government that protects it. With the increase of emphasis on property and property rights, the state made more and more laws until more laws deal with property than with individual rights. "Too much weight has been allowed in the laws to property. Its influence on persons is deteriorating."² "The feudal system survives in the steep inequality of property and privilege."³ "Never was a people so choked and stultified by forms. We adore the forms of law, instead of making them vehicles of wisdom and justice."⁴

In his historical treatment of trade Emerson again saw the growing freedom of the former serfs. "We rail at trade, but the historian of the world will see that it was the principle of liberty; that it settled America, and destroyed feudalism, and made peace and keeps peace; that it will abolish slavery."⁵ (So assured was he on this matter of slavery as it pertained to the United States, that he added two years later in his Journals: "Cotton thread is the Union.") "Trade was the strong man that broke Feudalism down and raised a new and unknown power in its place."⁶ But because of its illimitable power, unless it remained a "very intellectual force," the evil of it "would put everything into market; talent, beauty, virtue,

1 Politics

2 Ibid.

3 Result

4 Speech on Affairs in Kansas

5 Journals

6 The Young American

and man himself."¹ "The aristocracy of trade has no permanence."²

Any excess of selfishness or diversion of interests from the good of the majority produces temporary setbacks to the progress of democracy. Emerson feared "the machine un-³manning the man"; he hated the thought of the spirit of a worker ever becoming enslaved; he knew that enlightened civili-⁴zation rarely existed in regions where wealth was sudden. These were real tragedies in comparison to bad times resulting from natural causes. At least, the latter had scientific⁵ value. "I should not be pained at a change which threatened a loss of some of the luxuries of society, if it proceeded from a preference of the agricultural life."⁶ "When abuses in commerce shall be redressed, then a man may select the fittest⁷ employment for his peculiar talent again, without compromise." These thoughts were the signposts for a higher type of individual existence. To them Emerson added: "The land is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our⁸ culture." "I want the necessity of supplying my own wants.⁹ All this costly culture of yours is not necessary." "Take

1 The Young American; also Wealth in Conduct of Life

2 Ibid.

3 Wealth in English Traits

4 The Superlative

5 Considerations by the Way

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8 The Young American

9 The Conservative

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- 1 The Young American; also Wealth in Conduct of Life
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Wealth in English Traits
- 4 The Spectator
- 5 Considerations by the Way
- 6 See the Reformer
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 The Young American
- 9 The Conservative

away from me the feeling that I must depend on myself, and
 instantly I relax my diligence."¹ "Society can never prosper
 but must always be bankrupt, until every man does that which
 he was created to do."² "In any country every man ought to
 be appraised and know for himself his worth."³ "The distinc-
 tion of man is his labor."⁴ "A cultivated laborer is worth
 many untaught. A scientific engineer is worth thousands."⁵
 "One of the meters of the height to which any civility rose
 is the skill in the fabric of iron."⁶

Whether any permanent good could come from such
 socialistic views as: "The manual labor of society ought to
 be shared among all members."⁷ and "Let the amelioration in
 our laws of property proceed from the concession of the rich."⁸
 may not be known for some time; at least they have been and
 are being experimented with. But on the other hand, the
 spiritual truth of Emerson's horse-and-buggy view on charity
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 society at large with somewhat more of certainty than he who
 devotes himself to charities."⁹

America seemed God-prepared for the noble experiment
 of democracy. "The power of labor which belongs to the

1 Journals

2 Wealth in Conduct of Life

3 Aristocracy

4 The Fortune of the Republic; also, The American Scholar

5 Progress of Culture

6 The Superlative

7 Man the Reformer

8 Ibid.

9 Farming

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- 1 Journals
- 2 Walter in Conduct of Life
- 3 Aristocracy
- 4 The Fortune of the Republic; also, The American Scholar
- 5 Progress of Culture
- 6 The Superlative
- 7 San the Reformer
- 8 Idyl
- 9 Parable

English race fell here into a climate which befriended it."¹
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V. EDUCATION

So many times did Emerson suggest throughout his writings that ultimate faith in democracy was going to depend upon the continuous spiritual development of the people themselves, it is logical that his ideas on education should find a climactic position in this paper. Emerson was reaching his own height of powers at the very time when his native state of Massachusetts was leading the way in the greatest single step a nation or a commonwealth ever took in advancing the cause of democracy, - namely, free, compulsory public education. Strangely his lectures and essays did not refer to actual legislation at the time, nor did he make reference to his famous contemporary Horace Mann; but he read aright the challenges appearing throughout the country, and his philosophy and pedagogy were harmonious with what is still being attempted in our schools. A country of such grandeur, with its heterogeneous population, inspires and expresses "the most expansive and humane spirit."⁴

¹ Boston

² The Young American

³ Character; also, Perpetual Forces

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1 Boston
 2 The Young American
 3 Character; also, Perpetual Forces
 4 The Young American

Freedom, morality, honesty, fearlessness, simplicity, and practicality were the basic elements of his spiritual philosophy. There was no need for a Legion of Honor in America; a spiritual affinity with other greats should be enough.¹ "I believe in the closest affinity between moral and material power."² "One condition is essential to the social education of man, - namely, morality."³ "Wild liberty develops iron conscience."⁴ "We are justified in preferring morals to every other science; for that science has more permanent interest than any other."⁵ "Fashion is virtue gone to seed: it is a kind of posthumous honor."⁶ "Any deference to some eminent man or woman of the world, forfeits all privilege of nobility."⁷ The forthrightness of the boy from Dame's School appealed to Emerson's sense of emancipation: "I'm as good as you be."⁸ "The unremitting retention of simple and high sentiments in obscure duties is hardening the character."⁹ The lack of this quality was pointed out by Emerson in an outstanding figure like Sumner: "He has the foible of most public men, the egotism which seems almost unavoidable at Washington."¹⁰ And finally in the spirit of condemnation: "America - Speed

- 1 Aristocracy
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Civilization
- 4 Politics
- 5 The Present State of Ethical Philosophy
- 6 Manners
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Boston
- 9 Heroism
- 10 Journals

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- 1 Autocracy
- 2 Idol
- 3 Civilization
- 4 Politics
- 5 The Present State of Ethical Philosophy
- 6 Immense
- 7 Idol
- 8 Boston
- 9 Metaphor
- 10 Journals

and fever are never greatness; but reliance and serenity and waiting."¹

For the schools themselves Emerson saw dangers in education only if naturalness were spoiled and artificiality developed.² Following 1840 Emerson was aware of a new moral age, which developed in a parallel fashion with the Victorian Age in England. He hoped that the new consciousness of power would find its aim as it went along.³ He expected little aid from the newspapers: "The journals contrive to furnish exactly one good piece of news every day."⁴ "There is a drag of inertia which resists reform in every shape,"⁵ but the schools had possibilities of teaching social ethics, general culture, physical development, and a practical preparation for public life and a livelihood. It would be a slow process, but it was the part of wisdom. "We hold to this, until you can demonstrate something better,"⁶ and time might fulfill a fond hope: "Amidst a planet peopled with conservatives, one Reformer may yet be born."⁷ Until then, the occasional brilliant teacher had to be the leader. "Law of gravity is the universal law of centrality. The mass in a group must respond to a magnetic power."⁸

1 Journals

2 Ibid.

3 Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England

4 Fate

5 Result

6 The Conservative

7 Ibid.

8 Progress of Culture

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- 1 Journals
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 The Conservative
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Progress of Culture

For the ability to live together in society students had to be guided by balance.¹ "What good are all sorts of talents in a maniac?" "Men's actions are too strong for them. Show me a man who has acted and who has not been the victim and slave of his action."² They must avoid ignorant gossip and misunderstanding. "Is not General McClellan an American citizen? And is it not the first attribute and distinction of an American to be abused and slandered as long as he is heard of?"³ They must be aware of their relation with the state. "To the intemperate and covetous person mankind would pay no rent, no dividend, if force were once relaxed."⁴ Affectation should be below them: "Great men are not commonly in its halls; they are absent in the field."⁵

The basis of academic work was to be creative reading. "Man hopes; genius creates"⁶ suggested a curriculum for original research. Dr. Samuel Johnson had suggested: "Read anything five hours a day, and you will soon be learned."⁷ Emerson took exception to the great reading of novels, for "it shows how much we need real elevations."⁸ For this need of a more imaginative literature, he presented poetry, "the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of the thing."⁹

1 The Scholar

2 Goethe; or, the Writer

3 Journals

4 The Conservative

5 Manners

6 The American Scholar

7 Books

8 Ibid.

9 Poetry and Imagination

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- 1 The Scholar
- 2 Gleaner; or, the Writer
- 3 Journals
- 4 The Conservative
- 5 Lectures
- 6 The American Scholar
- 7 Books
- 8 Tith
- 9 Poetry and Imagination

"The poet is the liberator."¹ As a convincing corollary of the power of poetry he added: "The wicked man has never written poetry."² Any great³ writer, furthermore, "contains the germs of any history."³ The method of teaching literature or any subject was by emulation. In this he was much opposed to the Dartmouth system.⁴

Aesthetic values were not to be overlooked: "I do not undervalue the fine instruction which statues and pictures give."⁵ "How to give all access to the masterpieces of art and nature is the problem of civilization. If properties of this kind were owned by states, towns, and lyceums, they would draw the bonds of neighborhood closer. A town would exist to an intellectual purpose."⁶ A still more public display would be beautiful public gardens "which might well make the land dear to the citizen, and inflame patriotism."⁷ Perhaps because of the incompleteness within the individual, Emerson felt certain dangers if artistic training were overdone. In regard to some musical artists: "Politics, bankruptcy, frost, famine, war - nothing concerns them but a scraping on a catgut, or tooting on a bass French horn."⁸ "Men of the world feel that most idealistic views unfit children for business in their

1 Journals

2 Poetry and Imagination

3 Journals

4 Ibid.

5 Domestic Life

6 Wealth in Conduct of Life

7 The Young American

8 Journals

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- 1 Journals
- 2 Poetry and Imagination
- 3 Journals
- 4 Life
- 5 Domestic Life
- 6 Wealth in Conduct of Life
- 7 The Young American
- 8 Journals

sense. The scholar is unfurnished who has only literary weapons."¹

With a more rounded development in mind, Emerson was much in favor of physical training. In viewing some sturdy laborers, he commented: "Cultivation never, except in war, makes such forms and carriage as these."² Being favorably impressed with West Point: "I think it excellent that such tender youths should be made so manly and masterly in rough exercise of horse and gun and cannon and muster. I think their ambition should be concentrated on their superiority in science."³ "Our culture therefore must not omit arming of the man."⁴ "I wish to have rural strength and religion for my children, and I wish city facility and polish."⁵ "Sport is the bloom and glow of a perfect health."⁶ "Generals and leaders of colonies esteem men of irregular and passionate force the best timber."⁷

Besides all these educational principles which, more or less, had to do with development within the individual, Emerson made the greater demand, of course, which impelled schools and colleges to make the young people capable of understanding public affairs and of assuming full responsibilities. If "a⁸ dollar in a university is worth more than a dollar in jail,"

1 The Scholar

2 Journals

3 Ibid.

4 Heroism

5 Journals; also, Culture

6 Heroism

7 Considerations by the Way

8 Wealth in Conduct of Life

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- 1 The Scholar
- 2 Journals
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Journals
- 5 Journals; also, Culture
- 6 Journals
- 7 Considerations by the Way
- 8 Wealth in Character of Man

then as a primary step they must be able to assimilate the influx of aliens. "I see with joy the Irish emigrants landing at Boston, at New York, and say to myself, There they go - to school."¹ Among Americans there was an overabundance of "haste, slipshod ways, flippant self-assertion."² Furthermore, "there is an American disease, a paralysis of the active faculties, which falls on young men as soon as they have finished their college education."³ The cause might be the bigotry of the college if a student "refuse prayers and recitations --- though he were Newton or Dante."⁴ From a personal point of view Emerson could smile over the misunderstanding that was allowed to exist about the teachers and professors themselves, when he said: "Country people look upon a scholar as nothing but a lecturer and member of the School Committee."⁵

But whatever the complaints, there must be open-mindedness. The struggle between real power and what is merely its established forms "is envenomed by ignorance and selfishness on both sides, which always depraves human affairs, and also prevents the war from being one purely of ideas."⁶ "Knowledge transfers the censorship from the State House to the reason of every citizen."⁷ This same type of knowledge about office-seekers would no longer let people venture "to put any man

1 Journals

2 Social Aims

3 A Letter in The Dial

4 Journals

5 Ibid.

6 Politics

7 Ibid.

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- 1 Journal
- 2 Social Aims
- 3 A Letter to The Dial
- 4 Journal
- 5 Self
- 6 Politics
- 7 Self

in any place without knowing his will."¹ When, after all,
 "the thought or fancy is actually a truth, then comes develop-²
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In a still more practical vein Emerson continued:
 "The steep antagonism between the money-getting and the
 academic class must be freely admitted, and perhaps is the
 more violent, that whilst our work is imposed by the sail and
 the sea, our culture is the tradition of Europe."³

If this clash between the goal of education and the
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 successful attainment in the process of education for a stable
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 enjoy; that intelligence, manly enterprise, good education,
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1 Aristocracy

2 War

3 A Letter in The Dial

4 Social Aims

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- 1 Autobiography
- 2 Var.
- 3 A Letter in The Dial
- 4 Social Aims

DIGEST OF THE THESIS

Just because the average reader of Emerson is inclined to think of him as only the Transcendental philosopher, it might be well to suggest the possibility that although he never wrote a scientific treatise on government or economics, or even a general paper on education, he filled his works with an awareness of the problems that faced a democracy.

In setting forth the problems, as well as envisioning a goal for democracy, he was guided by a wisdom that was compounded of his studies, his travels, his heritage, and his philosophy of faith and serenity. The type of progress which he hoped for was based upon the ultimate enrichment and wisdom of the individual. All civilized history had been pointing the way to freedom and ennoblement for every man. For a democracy to meet those growing ideals for mankind, both must believe in a purposeful existence, abiding by natural laws and moral attitudes.

In the matter of government Emerson felt that many, many errors of politics would have to be eradicated. Furthermore, he faced openly and courageously the existing weaknesses of society and established laws. If the form of government was finally to be organized "for the greatest good of the greatest number," it must be imbued with a liberalism that would slowly evolve a beneficent socialism.

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Broadly speaking, Emerson's main theory in the field of economics was a "creative economy," of benefit both to the individual and the country. With the absolutism of economic principles, there could be little of national socialism. The individual must have complete freedom without interference from the state. As labor is the basis for economic activities, Emerson expressed that governments exist for it. He defended free trade, feeling that it was the only basis for mutual advantage. A selfish misuse of resources had brought about a wrong emphasis upon property, until there existed more statute law about property rights than about rights of the individual.

If the ennoblement of man and society were to be eventually gained, then the responsibility lay chiefly upon proper education. Morality, simplicity, and plain-dealing were the main criteria. The school and community programs must emphasize social ethics, academic creativeness, aesthetic appreciation, physical development, and practical understanding. The last would be especially necessary for the proper relationship between state and citizen.

In summary, in his Social Aims Emerson admitted the obstacles, but did not lose heart, though the attainment of his ideals might be far in the future.

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As this thesis has been primarily to present Emerson's own expressions on the subject of democracy, perhaps the only deficiency in this bibliography is the incomplete use of his Journals. But as the entries in these Journals were used so copiously for the substance of his essays, letters, and lectures, it seems doubtful if further gleanings would in any way produce other than further illustrations of the ideas already set forth. That is why Bliss Perry's The Heart of Emerson's Journals has seemed adequate for this paper.

Emerson's biographical sketch of Thoreau and his

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Emerson's biographical sketch of Thoreau and his

address at the memorial meeting for Theodore Parker (Old South Leaflets, Volume IV) produced nothing significant for the subject of democracy. Likewise, the two volumes of letters: Letters from Ralph Waldo Emerson to a Friend (Houghton, Mifflin. 1899) and Correspondence between Emerson and John Sterling (Houghton, Mifflin) are so completely on literary subjects that they have little bearing. The two volumes of correspondence between Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson (James R. Osgood and Company. 1883) presented five brief statements that might have been quoted, had more illustrations been needed. They appear in the letters of August 8, 1839, April 19, 1853, April 17, 1855, December 8, 1862, and January 7, 1866. (James R. Osgood and Company. 1883)

For critical essays on Emerson that are somewhat pertinent to the topic of democracy, Poole's Index to Periodical Literature and its successor, the Reader's Guide, from the year 1882 up through 1937, list fifteen articles. None of this material has been used, however; for, as already stated, the purpose of this thesis is to organize Emerson's own conceptions without attempting a study of the background of and the causes for Emerson's view. That, it seems to me, is the scope of a doctorate's thesis.

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